



Bowel Program for Regular Bowel Emptying

This handout explains how to train your bowels to follow a daily routine. This is called a “bowel program.”

Changes in Bowel Emptying

Many things can affect your usual pattern of emptying your bowels. Some of these are:

- Decreased activity
- An illness or injury
- Changes in the foods you eat
- Decreased abdominal muscle tone
- Decreased or missing sensation

Your Bowel Program

You can train your bowels to follow a daily routine. This will help you avoid constipation, bowel accidents, and skin irritation.

Pick a regular time that will work at home and fits your daily schedule. Often the best time is after a meal or a warm drink like coffee, tea or hot chocolate. Hot drinks with caffeine help to move stool toward the rectum.

Eating plenty of fruit and fiber, such as bran cereal, prunes, or fresh oranges, can also help you stay regular. You may find that certain other foods also work well for you.

Be aware that some medicines can slow down bowel movements and cause constipation. Some of these medicines are:

- Narcotic pain relievers such as codeine or oxycodone
- Ditropan

Your health care provider may advise you to use medicines such as Colace or Metamucil. These help keep the stool soft. Do not use laxatives like milk of magnesia, Ex-lax, or do enemas often because they can damage your bowels.

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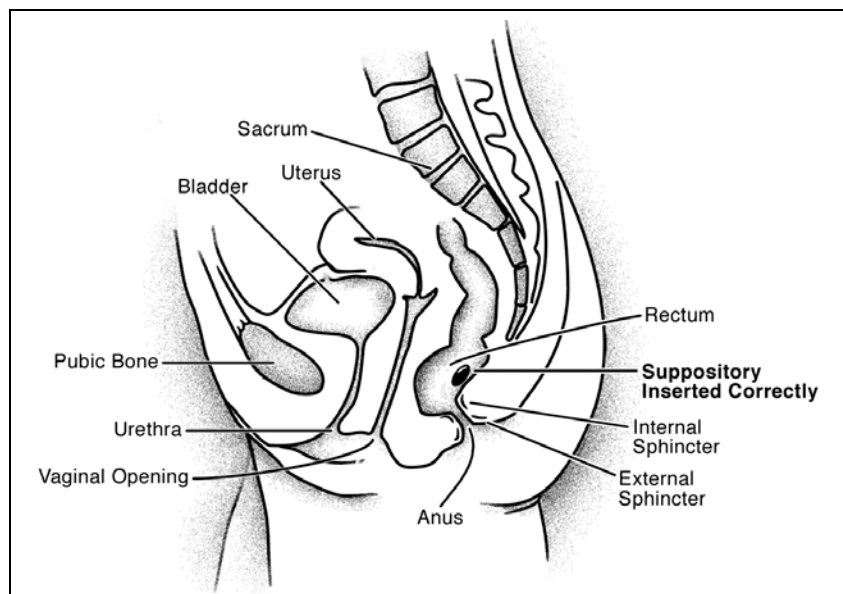
Your provider may also advise you to use a glycerin, Dulcolax, or “Magic Bullet” suppository, or an Enemeez as part of your bowel program.

To start your bowel program, you will need:

- Toilet, bedside commode, or protective padding (if you are in bed)
- Disposable gloves
- Water-soluble lubricant (such as K-Y or Surgilube) or Xylocaine jelly
- Suppository or Enemeez, if needed
- Clean washcloths

Steps

1. Plan to do your bowel program 10 to 20 minutes after eating a meal or drinking a hot drink.
2. Lay on your left side in bed. This helps the stool to enter the rectum.
3. Place a protective pad under your buttocks.
4. Put on the disposable gloves. Lubricate your suppository with a water-soluble lubricant. If you have a problem with rectal pain, your provider may tell you to use Xylocaine jelly for lubrication.
5. Insert the suppository into your rectum so that it goes past the external and internal *sphincters* (muscles in your rectum – see picture below).



The rectum and where to insert the suppository

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Rehabilitation Clinic:
206-598-4295

6. Make sure the suppository is placed against the wall of your rectum. It will slowly dissolve and begin to work.
7. **Wait.** Suppositories take about 5 to 30 minutes to dissolve. Enemeez works in 5 to 10 minutes.
8. When you are ready, get up to use the toilet. Sitting up will help your bowel empty. If you must stay in bed, it is best to lie on your left side.
9. Use a lubricated, gloved finger to check your rectum for emptying. Gently insert your finger into your anal canal. Slowly move the finger in a circle. This slight stretching of the *sphincters* (muscles in the rectum) helps to stimulate bowel emptying. This is called *digital stimulation* or simply *digitals*. *Digit* is another name for finger.
10. Continue to do digital stimulation every 5 to 7 minutes.
11. If your rectum is empty after 1 or 2 digitals, you are done with your bowel program. Finish by gently cleaning the area around your anus.

When to Call Your Doctor or Nurse

Call your health care provider if you have:

- Ongoing constipation
- Ongoing diarrhea
- Pain
- Blood in your stool
- Tarry, black stools
- *Hemorrhoids* (swollen veins in your rectum or anus)

Notes

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